

Below Weather Mins for Ev

By LCdr. Michael Carambas



Our squadron was in the throes of COMPTUEX during winter in the Southern California operations area. The ceilings were falling, and the deck was pitching. As the squadron operations officer, I had been tasked by the air wing to fly our battle group commander (a naval flight officer) in our new mission-computer-upgrade Hawkeye.

The fam flight would consist of the admiral getting a cat shot in the copilot seat, followed by a tour in the combat information center. It

would be an opportunity to show him the improvements to our weapons system and the command's enhanced ability to serve as a battle-group, airborne-battle manager. After checking out the back end, the admiral would return to the copilot seat. Our skipper would serve as aircraft commander; he also was the air wing's top-hook aviator.

Case III launches preceded our NATOPS flight briefing, and the metro brief showed the weather deteriorating. Our crew briefed and discussed the requirements for flying with non-

Everyone

gear. As we watched the PLAT for the current recovery, we noticed the ceilings had dropped significantly since our metro brief. Recovering aircraft were calling clara at three-quarters of a mile and not picking up the ball until a half-mile from the ramp. There were some interesting passes during the recovery. I wondered if the weather might make us cancel our flight. Our skipper remained confident we could get the X. We really wanted to show off our new aircraft to the boss.

Once we had finished dressing out, the SDO came up to me and said the air plan had changed. Every event, except ours, was cancelled due to weather. A call to the forecasters confirmed weather around the ship was 250-foot ceilings and half-mile visibility. Our skipper was concerned about the weather, especially since the admiral was not qualified in our aircraft. As a former aviation-safety officer, I felt the hairs on the back of my neck stand. Our plan sounded like one of our case studies during ASO School. I told my skipper about my concerns and said this was an ORM issue.

My CO agreed and tried to contact the CAG to recommend we cancel our flight. Just as CAG was answering the skipper's call, the admiral returned from his flight-deck training. He told my CO, "Sorry, skipper, but I'm canceling our flight. The weather doesn't look that great out there, don't you agree?"

I never saw my skipper so happy to say, "Yes sir, I agree. We need to cancel. We'll reschedule you when the weather's better, right Ops O?"

I was even happier in my answer to the CO, "Aye, aye sir. I'll get with the flag lieutenant and coordinate another flight."

You never should feel pressured to get out the X, even when it means a flight for the battle group commander. As a crew, we not only briefed ORM, but we also used it to control risk. We re-examined external conditions (decreasing visibility due to weather) and internal conditions (lack of aircrew experience and qualifications).



LCdr. Carambas flies with VAW-117.

NATOPS-qualified aircrew. One crew member would have to take the admiral to the flight deck to conduct a ditch-and-bailout drill prior to launch. Without ejection seats, you are either parachuting or swimming away from a Hawkeye. We concluded our brief with operational risk management, which included contingencies, conflict management, crew decision-making, and conditions that would keep us from completing the flight.

A junior pilot took the admiral to the flight deck to conduct the ditch-and-bailout training, while the rest of our crew put on our flight